

Claims

1. A thermal transfer medium comprising a substrate bearing on at least part of one surface thereof a coating layer of a thermally transferable overlay material for transfer onto a thermal transfer image formed on a receiver material, wherein the coating layer comprises polyester having a Tg greater than 50°C and a molecular weight in the range 6,000 to 10,000.
2. A thermal transfer medium according to claim 1, wherein the polyester has a Tg of at least 75°C.
3. A thermal transfer medium according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the polyester has a Tg of about 80°C and a molecular weight of about 7,000.
4. A thermal transfer medium according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the polyester has a Tg of about 77°C and a molecular weight of about 7,500.
5. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the coating further comprises filler material.
6. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the coating further comprises one or more ultra-violet light absorbers.
7. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the coating further comprises one or more optical brighteners.
8. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the substrate comprises a film of heat-resistant material selected from polyesters, polyamides, polyimides, polycarbonates, polysulphones, polypropylene and cellophane.

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9. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the coating has a thickness in the range 0.5 to 5.0 μ m, preferably 1.5 to 3.5 μ m, typically 1.6 to 2.0 μ m.

10. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, further comprising a subcoat between the substrate and coating.

11. A thermal transfer medium according to claim 11, comprising a cross-linked acrylic subcoat.

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12. A thermal transfer medium according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the other surface of the substrate has a heat-resistant backcoat.

13. A thermal transfer medium, comprising an elongate strip of substrate material having on one surface thereof a plurality of similar sets of thermally transferable dye coats and mass transfer layers, each set comprising a respective coat of each dye colour, yellow, magenta and cyan, and a respective mass transfer layer for colorant and overlay, each coat or layer being in the form of a discrete stripe extending transverse to the length of the substrate, with the sets arranged in a repeated sequence along the length of the substrate, wherein each overlay material mass transfer layer comprises a coating of an overlay material comprising polyester having a glass transition temperature (Tg) greater than 50°C and a molecular weight in the range 6,000 to 10,000.

14. A method of making a thermal transfer medium, comprising forming on one surface of a substrate a coating of an overlay material comprising polyester having a glass transition temperature (Tg) greater than 50°C and a molecular weight in the range 6,000 to 10,000.

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15. A method of forming an overlay on a receiver material, comprising superposing a thermal transfer medium in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 13 and a receiver material; and applying localised heating to the thermal transfer medium to form an overlay on the receiver material.

16. A method according to claim 15, further comprising producing a printed image on the receiver material by thermal transfer printing prior to formation of the overlay.

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17. Receiver material bearing an overlay produced by the method of claim 15 or 16.

18. Receiver material according to claim 17, comprising a card of polyvinyl chloride.

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19. Receiver material according to claim 17 or 18, wherein the receiver material has an image-receiving surface comprising vinyl chloride/vinyl acetate copolymer.

20. Receiver material according to claim 17, 18 or 19, in the form of an identification card bearing a full colour image produced by thermal transfer printing and text and/or a bar code produced by mass transfer printing of colorant.